

## WHAT WAS THE MESSAGE OF JESUS?

By Bob Young

December is a time of year when much of the world thinks about “Christmas.” More people think about Jesus in December than at any other time of year, with the possible exception of Easter. I believe that Christmas may be more popular than Easter.

Christmas is about love, joy, and peace. Even if the Easter story quickly moves to resurrection and hope, it has to begin with the story of cruelty and death.

At Christmas, love is a popular message.

Last month, a few days before Christmas, I asked a small gathering of Christians about the most significant parts of the Jesus story, the message of Jesus. The first response was “love.”

How would you expect Christians to respond to the question of the title?

I recently read a report that followed a Facebook thread, responding to that very question. “The main message of Jesus was love one another....Yes, love was his central message....It was love.” No one challenged those responses. Do most people think that “love” is the correct answer? Do you?

Think with me.

The idea that “all you need is love” was not Jesus’ central message. The idea that love is more important than anything else must ultimately be discarded, despite the fact that “they will know we are Christians by our love” (John 13:35) and “God is love” (1 John 4:7).

The idea that Jesus came to earth primarily to teach people to be loving sounds good to itching ears, but it distorts the gospel message.

Further, it misidentifies Jesus. It makes Jesus into someone He was not and never intended to be.

### **In Mark 1, Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom.**

The central message of Jesus was earth-shaking, revolutionary, life-changing, impactful!

In my Wednesday Bible class, we were studying Mark’s Gospel. Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom in **Chapter 1**, three years before his death. He was not preaching his death, burial, resurrection, although he predicted that later in his ministry.

Jesus was preaching a kingdom gospel that called people to turn their backs on the systems of the world—political systems, religious systems, social systems. Jesus called people to changed values, thinking, actions, language, pleasures. Lay it all down, even one’s own life. Why? To surrender life to Jesus, the one who is Lord of all, over all kinds of authorities, kingdoms, powers. Lord of your life. Living out that reality, kingdom life, will totally remake us, what we do, who we are, what we think, how we respond.

Jesus calls us to live out this kingdom life in the community of others who have embraced the gospel of the kingdom. The faith community is identified by its reception and application of the kingdom gospel, living sacrificially, doing without, limiting consumption, sharing resources, rejecting the bigger barns (bigger houses, newer cars, vacations, experiences).

Then, Jesus’ teaching about love only makes sense in the context of those who have submitted to his Lordship and kingdom. Non-kingdom people will never “get” it. Church people who are not kingdom people will misread it and misapply it.

It is true that love, agape love, is a basic operating principle of the kingdom of God. One must listen carefully to hear Jesus' definition of love.

But agape love begins with losing your life, denying self, taking up the cross. Otherwise, "one cannot be a disciple of Jesus."

What was Jesus' message? I briefly review what we know, but perhaps do not understand. I am thinking about **Mark's Gospel: Chapter 1, repent and believe; Chapter 16, believe and be baptized. Three concepts: repentance, belief, baptism. What do those words mean?**

**FORSAKE.** We must rethink, understand biblical repentance (forsaking all). Get rid of all previous thinking, priorities, desires, attitudes, which will lead to getting rid of previous actions and lifestyles. How do I know I have repented? When I have forsaken all that formerly mattered. Resources reinvested; new priorities.

**ENTRUST.** We must seek to understand biblical faith, entrusting all to Jesus. All. Everything. Depend on Jesus for everything. This may be a mental process, but it becomes obvious in life – how we spend resources, time, finances. Show me your calendar, show me your checkbook. Your calendar and your checkbook will make clear, "Disciple or no?" If someone questions your discipleship, is their enough evidence to prove your claim?

**RECEIVE.** And we must not let go of the biblical model for receiving Jesus' life into our very selves, our beings, being renovated, born again, the new birth.

The result?

We become partakers of the divine nature. Where is the evidence of divine nature in your life? Your worship? Your calendar? Your relationships?

Where are you seen doing what Jesus did? Telling the same story, same priorities, same values, same goals, same purpose?

The nature of the divine life is love, and Christian love is not possible without receiving Christ having his Spirit indwell us. This is why so much of the talk about love is meaningless, bland, unfocused.

Any human being can be nice, kind, pleasant, generous. But outside of Christ, outside of **forsaking, entrusting, receiving** (repentance, faith, baptism), it is impossible to live out, day after day, the reality of divine agape love.

On my website, I write that my greatest joy is to be a kingdom person advancing kingdom things, developing authentic kingdom people. Disciples making disciples.

Let us not deceive ourselves. What is happening in our churches is the result of what we are sowing. We reap what we sow?

When we sow the gospel of the kingdom, people will talk about sacrifice, service, counting cost, paying price. And we will know that we have loved, as a parent investing all of life in a child, as a friend investing all of life so that more friends will know Christ.

There is a great need to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom, beginning in the churches, because the truth of the gospel of the kingdom is still unknown to many Christians. This is especially true in the US, and often in other countries as well, because the gospel did not come with a message of forsaking all else, entrusting all of life, and receiving total newness.